

You Can't Live  
Your Own Life

Edgar A. Guest

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*By*  
**Edgar A. Guest**

*Verse—*

The Light of Faith  
The Passing Throng  
A Heap o' Livin'  
Just Folks  
The Path to Home  
Poems of Patriotism  
When Day Is Done  
Rhymes of Childhood

*Illustrated—*

All That Matters

*Gift Books—*

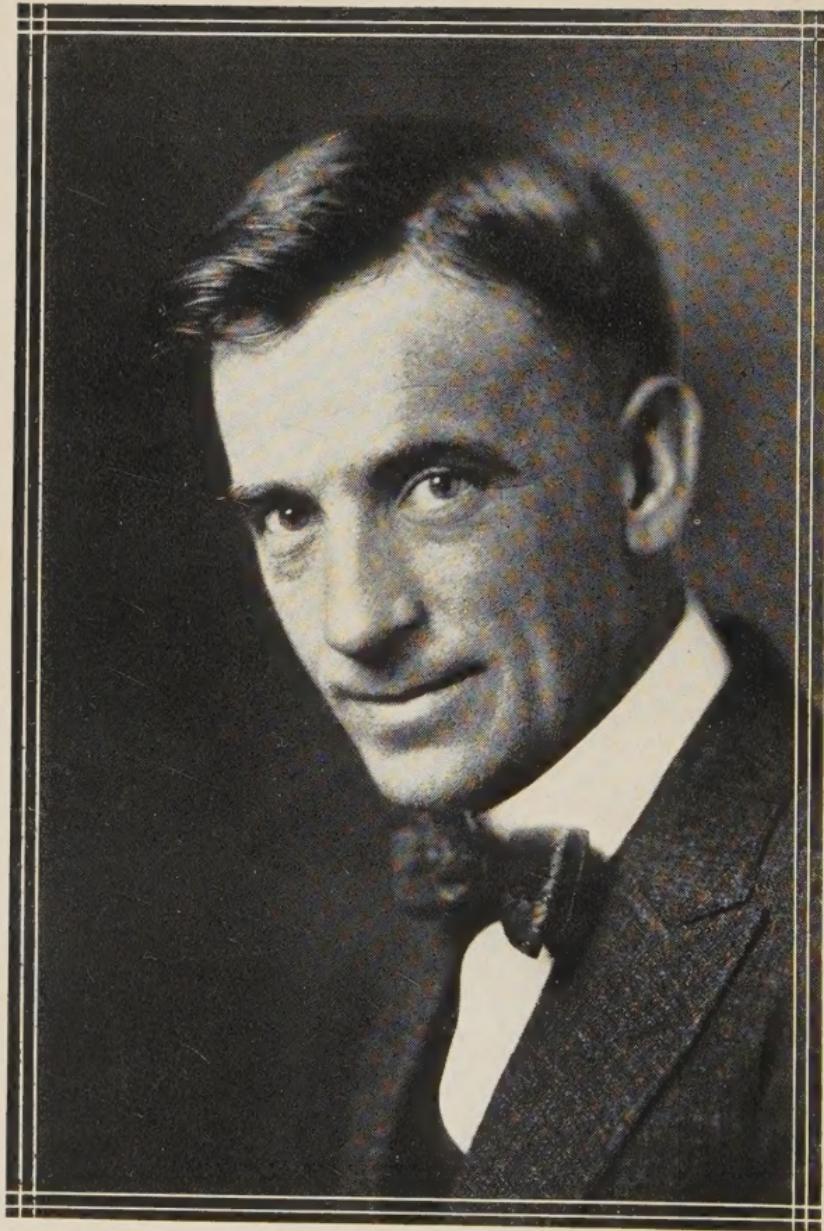
Mother  
Home  
Friends  
You

*Prose—*

Making the House a Home  
My Job As a Father  
What My Religion Means to Me  
You Can't Live Your Own Life



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*Edgar A. Guest*

# You Can't Live Your Own Life

*by*

Edgar A Guest



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## Contents

You Can't Live Your Own Life.....	11
What I Owe the Other Fellow.....	43
What My Neighbors Mean to Me.....	65



## You Can't Live Your Own Life



DON'T care what people think," said a high-strung, temperamental young friend of mine the other day, "I've got my own life to live."

Foolish boy! He didn't realize that he was talking nonsense. We *can't* live our own lives in the selfish sense he meant, for the simple reason that they aren't ours to live. My life belongs to my wife, to Bud and Janet, to my friends. Yours belongs to another group of persons.

Our slightest act affects those who love us and believe in us. There isn't a life on earth so humble, or seemingly so insignificant, that it doesn't touch some other

life. Indeed, there are few individuals who aren't the most important persons in the world to somebody.

Years ago, when I was a police reporter on the Detroit *Free Press*, I was attracted early one morning by a crowd gathering near a street-corner patrol box. I stepped across the street to see what was happening. I found a very much intoxicated and belligerent young man in the custody of an officer.

“Just a common drunk,” said one of the bystanders as I elbowed my way into the throng.

The boy was putting up a fight against arrest. His clothing was torn and his face was scratched and streaked with dirt. Suddenly the belligerency died out of him and he began to cry.

“Please let me go home, Officer,” he pleaded like a child. “I don’t want to disgrace my family. This will kill my mother.”

“Yeah,” growled the officer; “but the trouble with you guys is you don’t think about your folks soon enough.”

Somebody in the crowd laughed. At this point, a patrol wagon arrived and the boy was taken to the lock-up.

It was only a trivial incident in the life of a big city, but I have never forgotten it. Probably I never shall. I have heard that cry, “This will kill my mother,” countless times since. It is often the first sentence to fall from the lips of young offenders who have been caught.

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But young people are not the only ones who do their thinking too late.

"I could stand the punishment myself," said a once prominent citizen of a Mid-Western town who had defaulted and had been brought to justice, "if I didn't have to think of what my wife and children must suffer while I am in prison. I wish I had died before I stole that money."

He had remembered too tardily that his life belonged to others; but he was right when he suggested that his death would have been easier for his loved ones to bear than the disgrace he brought upon them. There are griefs more bitter, and hurts more cruel, than those inflicted by

death. There are sore spots which never cease to be sensitive; wounds of the spirit which never heal.

SOMETIMES we get down-hearted and allow ourselves to feel that we do not count for much. In this thought lies tragedy. The older I grow, the more firmly convinced I become of the tremendous importance of the individual.

Nature's interest is not in the individual but in the species, say the scientists. And in the natural world that may be true. Certainly, nature seems to kill off the weaklings that the sturdy may thrive.

Instinct prompts animals to fight for food and for their lives, but I do not believe that they know *why* they fight. Cats and lions have no desire

to improve themselves or to give happiness to others. Bugs and birds and fishes have no high dreams and aspirations. They are not sensitive to shame and sorrow; memory does not perpetuate their heartaches. By a single selfish or ignoble act no beast of the field can bring disgrace and humiliation to his fellows.

With human beings it is different. Every baby comes into the world laden with a cargo far more precious than silver or gold. In its tiny, helpless fingers lie the hopes and dreams and happiness of many others. Its birth makes father and mother of husband and wife. The parents of husband and wife become grandfather and grandmother. Down the line are uncles and aunts

and cousins and old-time friends and neighbors, whose lives are touched and changed by the arrival of this new life.

It is important to all these people that the baby shall grow into healthy, happy childhood, and later make of its life something in which they all take pride. The infant does not know this, of course, nor does the child at first. Often the adult does not realize it until too late. But the truth remains that each of us is a high-powered instrument of joy or sorrow to others.

**I** TRIED to give this thought to a high-school graduating class last June. There were a hundred and thirty boys and girls on the platform and the auditorium was filled

with admiring parents and friends. The scene is a familiar one, but it always takes hold of me. On this particular morning, my throat seemed to be somewhat lumpier than usual. I fancied that I knew what was passing through the minds of all those fathers and mothers out there. I could see myself sitting some day in such a throng, and my own boy a member of such a class. I wondered just what these boys and girls behind me were thinking of. By the time my name was called, all that I had *planned* to say had left me.

“Boys and girls,” I began impetuously, “you are looking into the faces of your fathers, mothers, and friends. To-day their faces are bright and smiling, because they

are proud of you and of your achievement. You can see for yourselves how happy you have made them. This is a great day for you; but it is a greater day for them, because it marks the fulfillment of one of their dreams for you. Presently, when you receive your diplomas, you will hear your dear ones cheer loudly, and you will see them exult.

“What a wonderful thing it is to have the power to make so many people happy! But, oh, what a tremendous responsibility such power carries with it! For if you break faith with them, if for one minute you forget that what you are and do is important to them, if for one careless, selfish moment you slip into shame and disgrace, the lives of all these happy people will be

saddened. Remember this scene as long as you live. It will help to keep you faithful to the trust that rests in you."

The other day at my club, a friend who sat with me at luncheon called across the room to another friend, "Your son dropped in to see me this morning. What a fine boy he is!"

What a pity that youth could not see his father's face light up with pride and satisfaction. In that one glance, the boy would have realized how much hinges upon him. Pride in his son is the greatest happiness that can come to a man. And the lad who determines to give his father that joy will achieve much for himself.

DRUNK though he was, that boy at the patrol box realized that he was important to somebody. Up to the moment of his arrest, his conduct had seemed to him his own private affair. Whose business was it whether or not he got drunk? He had his own life to live, and he would live it to please himself. But when he was brought up short by the hand of the law on his shoulder, his imagination showed him his mother's face and the truth—too late.

I am going to try to help my boy and girl use their imagination early in the game of life. I shall teach them to ask themselves to-day and every day, "Is this a wise thing to do, or a foolish one? Do men prosper and grow in the esteem of

their neighbors this way? Are women who conduct themselves thus and so respected and admired? Is this the road to a happy, comfortable, friendly life, or does it lead to scorn and degradation?"

I believe it is one of the chief duties of parents to help their children use their imaginations. The other day, I heard a fine story of a father who understands his job. This man is a house painter by trade, untutored in books, but very wise nevertheless. He had put his son through high school, and on the evening the lad came home with his diploma the father called him into his bedroom.

"My boy," he said, "the time has come for me to have a talk with you. To-morrow you are going out to

look for work, and from then on you will be living by your own efforts. I have done everything I can for you. Now, this is what I want you to know: There are just two jobs in the world, and you must choose between them.

“At one of those jobs you will have to work eight hours a day, for six days a week. You will receive a man’s pay, and you will be free in the evenings to do as you choose. Until you marry and have a home of your own, you may come here, change your clothes, eat dinner with your mother and me, and, if you like, go out later with your friends. You can have a sweetheart and with her go to the theatre occasionally; you can have friends, vacation trips, neighbors, and all

that makes a happy, normal life. There will be days when your work will seem like drudgery; but if you take that job, you will always have freedom and the right to enjoy those things which please you best.

“The other job, which you may have heard of and which you may be tempted to take, will pay you no regular wages. You will ‘get something for nothing’—but you will do it as a lawbreaker. Eventually, you will be working for the State, twelve hours a day in the most miserable of factories with the most miserable of men. When night comes, they will lock the door upon you; you will sleep upon a hard, narrow cot. You will have no sweetheart, no amusement, no friends,

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no father and mother to dine with,  
and no hope to look forward to.

“There they are, my boy—the two jobs which are waiting for you. Which are you going to take?”

And the youngster who told this to a friend of mine added:

“That’s all my dad said; but that night I thought it all out for myself, and I decided that I wanted to make something of myself. I’ve heard the gang on the street corner talking about ‘easy money,’ but they never once mentioned the price you have to pay. I hadn’t realized there was a price, until dad told me.”

LACK of imagination is often the father of tragedy, because it keeps us from realizing our importance—to others. Without imagina-

tion, we fail to see how many may be concerned by our blunders. A reckless boy driving a car fancies that he is alone. He thinks that if an accident should occur, he would be the only one injured. If he used his imagination, he would know that riding with him in the car are all the members of his family and all his friends. He cannot hurt himself without hurting them.

Is it not possible to doom ourselves to mediocrity because we do not let our imaginations show us our possibilities? We grow accustomed to the idea that we do not count for much. We forget that our lives can be shaped and molded by our own will to do and be.

A good name, a useful life, happiness—none of these is the result

of luck. Men do not drift into high places by chance. The average clean-minded, kindly, honest citizen who has made a good job of himself has looked at life as his opportunity. He has recognized his own importance as an individual.

When in camp, the Boy Scouts sometimes play a very interesting game: The patrol leaders give each lad a hatful of rubbish—bits of tin, nails, string, paper, canvas, anything which has been gathered up about the grounds. A prize goes to the boy who makes the most ingenious article from this unpromising material. The finished objects are judged both for workmanship and for usefulness.

I witnessed the judging last summer, and I was impressed by the variety of things which can be made from practically nothing. It occurred to me, as we examined the trinkets, that we were finding out not only which were the best articles but also which were the boys who knew how to make the most of their opportunities.

Life is like that Boy Scouts' game. It gives us bits of joy and sorrow; it hands us friends, hopes, disappointments. And we prove our worth by what we make of all these things.

**T**HE accident of birth puts us into this world, and the miracle of death takes us out of it. But between age and youth, we are in the

main the shapers of our own destinies. Any number of things can drag us down, but only one thing can lift us up. And that is the will to make the best of the opportunity life has given us.

It is impossible to measure the influence of any individual.

“I knew him when . . .” is a very human utterance. It represents the desire of every man and woman to express partnership in the life of another. If the boy who delivered groceries at our door twenty years ago is now head of a great business, we take pride in the thought that once his feet ran across our little patch of lawn. We even like to think that perhaps something which he caught from us is reflected in his achievement.

As the triumph of one we have known delights us, so also does the failure of another grieve us. The most casual of acquaintances can cause us a twinge of sorrow. Perhaps we read with little feeling about an accident which has stricken down a total stranger, but let a name we know ever so lightly appear in the record, and the whole thing takes on a different complexion.

It is impossible not to take an interest in others. Once they have crossed our paths, they become a part of our lives. Let the tramp at the back door commit a crime, or save the life of a child, and the neighbors will all be out to talk about him. If he has outraged decency, those who have fed him will

shudderingly regret the fact; if he has made a hero of himself, all who have seen him or fed him will boast of the fact.

What you do and what happens to you mean much to your friend. You can prove this by considering for a moment what your friend's life means to you.

**I**F a man is your friend, he can make you break your business engagements, keep you from your golf game, or interfere with your vacation. You may wake in the morning determined to follow to the letter the program you have mapped out for yourself, and yet within an hour you may find that your friend's need of you is greater than your need for selfish gain or

glory. Let the word come that he is ill or in trouble, and you close your desk with a bang and fly to his assistance. Is there a death in his family? You are at his side, and you remain there until there is nothing further you can do to comfort or aid him.

What are all these big home-comings and rejoicings about? Why did the people of Atlanta carry Bobby Jones on their shoulders when he returned to them with the British golf championship? To hundreds of those who gathered about him and shouted and cheered, the championship was merely the excuse for celebrating something far more important. Had Bobby Jones been a victorious tennis player or horseman, or had he written a prize-win-

ning song or book, the rejoicing would have taken place just the same. The joy was in the boy!

Bobby Jones of Atlanta! Their Bobby Jones! Bobby Jones, their playmate and champion; Bobby Jones, the youngster they had watched grow up, the son of their friends, and the schoolfellow of their sons and daughters! This lad had triumphed over the golfers of the world! And, in doing so, he had made them all proud and happy.

“Did you hear about young Jack?” said a friend to me the other day.

“No. What’s happened to him?”

“They’ve promoted him and given him his second raise in salary,

and he's been with the firm only about a year. His dad's tickled to death."

"*You* seem to be pleased about it, too," I said.

"I am," said my friend. "I'm as proud as if he were my own boy. His folks were neighbors of ours a few years ago and I took quite an interest in Jack. Fact is, I got him his first job. He's making good. He'll be a big man some day!"

Now, I didn't get Jack his first job, and I don't know him as well as my friend does; but I do know his mother and father. And his success has made me happy, too.

It is not often that we smile or weep alone.

SEVERAL years ago, when I was a reporter, fire destroyed a shoe factory and two workmen were burned to death. It fell to my lot to break the tragic news to the bereaved families.

I remember vividly the scene as I walked along the narrow little street on which one of those men had lived. The children were playing on the sidewalks in the summer sunshine. A woman was hanging out her washing. A group of housewives were standing at a wagon bargaining with a peddler for his vegetables. Another woman across the way was working in her garden, and watching her from the veranda next door was a gray-haired old woman in her rocking chair.

It was a peaceful and happy little street when I entered it. But when I left it a few moments later, it was in a turmoil of tribulation. The shriek of grief from the stricken widow instantly changed the aspect of the whole neighborhood. The huckster quit haggling over the price of his vegetables to find out why a woman had swooned on her front porch. The children stopped playing, and neighbors poured out of their houses to learn what had happened. Not until many days later did laughter ring again on that street as it rang the afternoon I ventured into the neighborhood with my sad news.

We owe it to our friends to be loyal to the faith they put in us.

Years ago, when I was first beginning to publish my verse, I got a letter from a friend in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Some line of mine had caught his fancy and he was moved to write me a word of appreciation.

“Eddie,” he closed that hasty note to me, “I want you to know that I think so much of you that should you ever do anything to lessen my opinion of you, it would hurt me beyond reparation.”

No doubt my friend has long since forgotten that sentence; but I shall never forget it. I have always felt that I am important to that man; that I can never afford to disappoint him.

THE self-indulgent life and the wise one do not travel the same road. For one, you must abandon the other. You'll seldom find Wisdom sitting on Folly's doorstep. Old Man Afterthought sobs, "What a fool I've been!" Better listen to Forethought's whispered warning, "Don't be a fool!"

Bill Brown (and that isn't his name) would give everything he owns to-day to recall one foolish hour. Up to a few months ago, Bill was a respected citizen. Happily married, the father of three fine children, successful in business, he was admired by all who knew him.

But Bill had one mighty foolish idea tucked away in his head. He thought that it didn't matter much what he did so long as he himself

was sure that he was doing no wrong. And in that spirit, one night Bill joined a gay party. There's no harm, argued Bill, in getting a little hilarious now and then.

But when an automobile crashed at two o'clock in the morning, and the young driver and a woman were killed, and another woman and another man and Bill were taken to the hospital, even Bill couldn't convince himself that he had done the wise and right thing.

Physically, Bill eventually recovered; but his wife and children are still paying the price of his folly. They have been hurt beyond recovery. And all because lovable, sweet-natured Bill had not found out that his life was not his to live!



# What I Owe the Other Fellow



## What I Owe the Other Fellow

 LL my life I have heard about the self-made man. He has been written up in all the leading publications of the world. He has frequently written of himself—not always from a spirit of pride, but often from a desire to inspire others even at the sacrifice of his own modesty.

The self-made man has become a symbol of energy and industry in our national life. I think he is more truly American than anything else. We have grown fond of him. We cultivate his acquaintance and we advertise his worth.

As a lad I was fed on books of the "From Farm Boy to Senator" type. We have all been told and retold that no gate is barred to the boy of courage and ability and integrity. True greatness, in the common belief, is nearly always self-made.

I learned that, and used to believe it. Now I am older and have met many men, great and otherwise, I still believe firmly in the possibilities of greatness in every healthy American boy. The farmer's lad may become senator; the boy on the obscure Illinois farm may rise to the Presidency of the United States; there may be, and undoubtedly is, another Henry Ford dreamily trudging his way to the district school this very morning; to-mor-

row's captains of industry may be selling newspapers on our street corners, and no doubt the papers of thirty years from now will be writing them up as "self-made."

In spite of all this, I have come to the conclusion that there is no such thing as a *self-made* man.

I have never known anyone who reached the goal we call success single-handed and alone. There is no such thing as solitaire in the game of life. To be a great leader, a man must have followers. To have followers, a man must have friends.

**N**O MAN is wholly self-made. It cannot be done, and it isn't done. All along the way, others have made *their* contributions to the fame and glory of the one.

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Each of us is the sum of our own efforts plus the gifts of others. How much of the deeds we are proudest of are our own, and how much came from friendly hands, we alone know, and that but vaguely.

The joy of accomplishment becomes conceit and arrogance when one forgets the assistance he has received, and assumes himself to be the exclusive author of his own achievement.

I have had a fortunate and fairly successful life, so far. Things have broken well for me. I have had my share of trouble, but I have never been in a pit from which I had to struggle out alone. Always, friends have stood by ready to help me.

Others have smoothed the rough way for me. I have had many a “hitch” on a kindly wagon going my way; many a swift ride in a motor car over roads where I might not have had the strength or courage or faith to go alone; and I stand to-day where I am—not yet at the top, I hope—resting on the kindly shoulders of uncounted friends.

I owe a lot to the other fellow. He has done much for me. As a matter of fact, the other fellow has made me possible. I cannot recount here all the kindly favors and helps I have received back through the years; but that they are a part of me and of my success I am sure.

The other fellow began taking an interest in me and my welfare when I was a boy attending school

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and putting in my spare time at a drug store, trying to make myself generally useful.

I was small of stature, but willing. I think I must have attracted the other fellow's attention first by having almost to stretch myself full length into that old-fashioned cigar case to get his favorite brand. It makes little difference now what caused him to notice me. The important fact is that he did and learned to know my name. That was really the beginning of my acquaintance with the other fellow.

**I**N THAT drug store I met men of every occupation. There were three who stand out in my memory to-day above the throng of others who daily came and went. One

was a banker, another a merchant, and the third was then employed as bookkeeper by the Detroit *Free Press*.

I didn't know it then, but I do now, that I was flirting with three opportunities. Each of those three other fellows had it in his power to shape my career. What my future was to be depended not entirely upon my own choice. The other fellow was to have his say in the matter. Had the banker or the merchant spoken first, the newspaper might never have heard of me. Had neither spoken, the drug store might still claim me.

But the other fellow took me from the soda-water counter sooner than I expected. The *Free Press* bookkeeper did the trick.

He offered me Saturday-afternoon employment in the counting department of that paper. I jumped at the chance. During the summer months I worked full time, and in addition took care of the baseball score board, which was then a feature of the paper's outdoor publicity program.

That was my start. That was the beginning of "the other fellow's" active interest in me. The bookkeeper has faded out of my life, but his place has been taken by scores of others who have contributed, and continue to contribute almost daily, something of themselves and their own to my happiness. I joined my paper in 1895, and from that day to this my name has been regularly on its pay roll. I hope to keep it there

until Death writes "30" after my last line of copy—that being the way we newspaper writers indicate that the story has come to an end.

As a reporter I could not have succeeded without the other fellow. He gave me my best stories.

I got the credit for getting them, but it was often the friend in the policeman's uniform, or in the plain clothes of the detective, who was really entitled to it. I was young then and thought much of myself. I had the notion that I was really doing it all; but I know now how much I depended for my success upon those with whom I came in contact.

The exclusive newspaper story always comes first from some other fellow. It *has* to come from some-

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where. It is not the product of the reporter's imagination, nor is it created by his own ability.

**I**N MY case, sometimes the other fellow was high in public office; sometimes he was patrolling a beat; sometimes he was a janitor in a building; sometimes a nurse in a hospital, or the driver of an ambulance; sometimes he was a prisoner in the jail, or a bartender, or a minister, or a mysterious anonymous friend over the telephone; but whoever or whatever he was, he contributed to my achievement.

When I was covering the police beat, the chief of detectives was friendly to me. He liked me and I liked him; we got along well together, but I should have failed in

my duty to my paper had I turned in only the stories which he was pleased to give out. When he made public a story, he gave it to *all* the reporters. He could not and would not play favorites. His news was never to be exclusive. The trick of the good reporter was to get it before the chief announced it.

This is my debt to the other fellow. He let me into the secrets.

“Where did you get that story you printed this morning,” the chief stormed at me one afternoon.

“I can’t tell you,” I replied.

“You’ll never get another bit of news out of this office unless you do,” was his threat. To which I answered, “I’d never get another good story around here if I did.”

He grinned and walked away. We argued that many and many a time, always with the same result. I never told; and while he may have suspected who the other fellow was, he was never certain. But he knew, and I knew, that the other fellow was helping to make me successful.

I DID not want to be a reporter all my life. I had my dreams and my ambitions. There was much that I wanted to do. The opportunity, however, lay not altogether with me but with others. I wanted to do creative work. I thought that I could do it, but I had never tried.

My first attempt was a bit of dialect verse. I created it. It was mine. I had done that single-handed

and alone. That was self-made. I shudder when I look at it now to see how crude and trivial a bit it was. If I were the Sunday editor and that indifferent work were handed to me I doubt that I should publish it.

Fortunately for me the Sunday editor was a gentle, kindly, helpful friend. I think now he saw, not the thing I had done, but the things I might some day do. He opened the Sunday page to me. He printed that first bit; and he did more—he printed my signature beneath it. I have never ceased being grateful to him. It was that one kindly act of his that has made possible much that has come to me since.

Had he rejected it; had he pointed out the weakness of it, or even

so much as smiled at the poverty of its thought, I might never again have ventured into the field of creative writing. Instead, he gave me encouragement and hope.

He was the other fellow shaping my career. He made it possible for me, time and again after that, to appear in his columns; and to him I owe much. He gave me my chance.

Life cannot be lived happily without the other fellow. We had an experience the other night: It was bitterly cold. We had been spending the evening with friends who live about twelve miles out in the country. We drove out in our car. Apparently we were equipped with all that human beings can possess for safety and comfort. We

might have said truthfully that we were independent of the world. We could pass the other fellow, or let him pass us, as we chose.

AT MIDNIGHT we began the journey home. For some reason or other, the motor, which had been reliable up to that minute, could not be started. We were twelve miles from home on a cruel night and powerless to move. Could we handle that situation single-handed and alone? Did we have brains or strength or money or ability enough to extricate ourselves from that embarrassing situation? No. We were stuck; we were up against it and the prospect was not encouraging.

But out poured our friends. Clothes lines were dug up from somewhere. The other fellow backed his car down to us, tried to tow us, but the ropes snapped and had to be discarded.

“Wait a minute,” said a friend; “I know where there’s a wire cable that won’t break.”

I have yet to learn where he obtained it. All I know is that when he reappeared he had with him enough wire to make a durable tow line; and with that to bind us together, the other fellow towed us that twelve miles and landed us safely at our front door.

Home on our own power? No! Home by the gracious and kindly act of the other fellow.

I often wonder where I'd be without the other fellow. He does so much for me. I get the credit for my daily column, but I know that the printer and the proofreader have more than once saved me from blunders. I complain bitterly, at times, when a dropped line ruins a verse. I often growl at the make-up man for running to-day what I wanted held for to-morrow. But the actual fact is that the boys up-stairs prevent more mistakes than they commit.

But why stop there? Every worthwhile thing that has come to me has come on the stream of good will of the other fellow. I have acquired what little I have, not by main strength or by single-handed

combat; it has become mine because the other fellow was willing to let me have it, glad to see me get it, and eager to *help* me to get it. I never see a newsboy on the street, doing his best to sell the newspaper for which I write, but that I feel he is a partner in my personal enterprise. Unless he were out there selling that paper successfully my position would not last long. I could not run all the departments by myself. The one-man band attracts a little attention as a curiosity, but he can never compete with a symphony orchestra as a maker of sweet music.

I have discovered this also: Whenever I seem to have come to the point where the larger opportunity is ready for me, it is the other

fellow who prepares the way. Every important step has been guided by kindly people. I have adventured in strange fields, but never alone. The other fellow has always been there to encourage and to assist.



# What My Neighbors Mean to Me



## What My Neighbors Mean to Me

**L**IFE, with all it brings of joy and care, is not an easy thing to take apart. We cannot know how much of a man's life is his own and how much is due to the influence of others. He would be poor indeed who had only his own strength with which to fight and his own resources to call upon for happiness.

Perhaps the commonest question which falls from the lips of our women is, "What will the neighbors think?" And the commonest retort to that little cry of fear is, "What do I care?"

I answered my wife that way my-

self a few days ago, when she stopped me as I was en route to the garden. When I have a flower bed to make I don't dress *up* for the work, I dress *down* for it. I have a pair of old corduroy trousers and a blue flannel shirt and a pair of old shoes, and I put them on—and take *off* all the pride I can.

I admit that I am not handsome to look upon in that garb. Occasionally strangers have taken me for a ditch digger. However, my neighbors have grown accustomed to seeing me so dressed in the spring of the year. If they really do object to my personal appearance in the garden, they have been too polite to speak of it.

But my wife annually looks at me

and cries, “What will the neighbors think?”

And, man-fashioned, I retort, “What do I care?”

This year, while working in the yard, I wondered about it. What *do* I care? What do my neighbors mean to me? Suppose there were no neighbors to consider? What if I had never known a neighbor? Would that which I call my life be what it is to-day? How much of the happiness we have known in the past did we create ourselves, and how much of it came from those who lived about us?

Who is it that makes Atkinson Avenue a good street in which to live? Not we alone, surely. Our neighbors have almost everything to do with that. If their character

should change for the worse there would be neither pride nor joy in the home we have grown to love. We would sell it and move away.

So I came to the conclusion that evening, as I worked in my old clothes, that I do care what my neighbors think; and I realized that by what my neighbors have thought in the past my life has been enriched.

THE earliest recorded memory of me goes back to a neighbor. She was Mrs. Brown, who came in to see me a few days after I was born and kept close watch over me through the first three years of my life. From what my mother has told me I know she was a good woman and a kindly one. There

were always sweetmeats in her pantry and a welcome at her door for me.

An iron gate closed the entrance to her yard. It was to this gate, I am told, I ran whenever I could escape my mother's watchful eye. Too small to unlatch it myself, I used to shake it with my fists, shouting at the top of my voice:

“B'own! B'own! Let me in!  
Please let me in!”

Even in those days, it seemed, I was taking happiness from my neighbor. Since then I have had many neighbors, and never a bad one.

DOCTOR ASSELIN and his family live next door to us to the west. I am always sure of a morning greeting from one of their windows. Little Betty, or Dean, or Honor, or Philip, the baby, will be there to wave a hand at me. During the summer evenings, the doctor and I sit together on the front porch bantering the women-folks or discussing seriously the problems of life.

It must be a lonesome existence living in a house away off by itself. I saw a beautiful dwelling the other day from the window of a train. It stood high on a hill, commanding a view of the valley below. It had many windows, wide verandas, smooth and glistening driveways leading to it.

Evidently its owner had built it with an eye to seclusion. There was no house within a mile of it. Far away and below him dwelt the people who might have been his neighbors—who perhaps once *were* his neighbors.

I should not like to live there. I should miss the neighbors' children and their shouts of greeting. I should miss smiling faces at window panes other than my own. I should dread going into the garden, beautiful though it might be, knowing that no one would come uninvited to share its splendor and to keep me company. I like a gate, when it is kept for people to pass through. But I do not like high walls and gates that are built to keep kindly neighbors out.

I can imagine no worse isolation than to have deprived one's self of neighbors. A house afar is a signal to the world that its occupants no longer care for little visits. They will summon their friends when they would have them call. Then they will dress the table elaborately and will wear their finest raiment. It will be an occasion set specially apart for friendship, and they will make much of it.

But you, with the merry little jest you heard to-day; you, with the glad news of your son who is in the big city; you, with the little grief and burden you would unbreast; you, with the cake you have just made and would so like to have us sample; you, in your shirt sleeves, who would sit for a few minutes and

talk of business or of politics—you must stay away. We are amply sufficient unto ourselves.

I WAS riding home from the baseball game one afternoon with a very rich friend of mine. He began his career as a poor boy and rose by diligent endeavor. He now lives in a great house in the exclusive Grosse Pointe residence district, near Detroit. On our way that evening, we passed the first little home he ever owned. It still stands on Cass Avenue, weather-beaten and stained now, and no longer his.

“Eddie,” he said to me, “there’s the house I used to live in. I think I got more joy out of that old front porch than out of anything I’ve

ever owned. Of course we're happy where we are to-day on the lake. It's beautiful. There's comfort and peace in it. But, after all, it isn't the best way to live."

By many who know him this man is considered coldly practical. He is not given to sentiment. When old things must give way to the new, he is not one to have much mercy on the old ones.

"It was in that little house that I really lived," he went on. "I had neighbors then. When supper was done, I used to sit out on that porch and always someone came to chat with me. I heard all that was going on for blocks around. We had friends then who dropped in and took supper with us."

"And now?" I asked.

“Now,” he answered, with a smile, “when friends come to dinner, they have been invited a week in advance. Nobody just drops in for a chat. It is seldom I go to my neighbors or they come to me, without some special reason. It seems to me we have made friendship more of a business than it used to be. Of course the demands on us now are great. We haven’t the time to do what we used to do. But the people who still have time to be neighborly are to be envied.”

I knew he meant what he said. He would not go back to that little house; he was not telling me that it is better to be poor. There is an advantage in riches which every man is eager to possess. He was merely expressing his regret that

he could not have carried upward with him some of the freedom of the past.

SOMETIMES I find a friend through suffering. Jim Potter had been a neighbor of mine for a year. He lived across the street from us on Fourteenth Avenue, where we first began our married life. He owned the drug store on the corner. As "Jim Potter" I knew him and passed the time of day with him. He was but a passing acquaintance, and each of us knows many such.

Then came the night our first baby was taken from us. I was having a struggle in those days to get along; and, I fancy, so was he. When I went to the drug store the next morning, he motioned me to

step behind the counter. I followed him to the rear of the store, where he put both his kindly hands upon my shoulders and said:

“Eddie, I can’t tell you what is in my heart. I am sorry—sorry! I just wanted to say that if—if you need money, come to me.”

Only a neighbor! Jim Potter may have forgotten the incident, but I shall never forget it. To me it stands out vividly; the blossoming of a neighbor into a true friend.

There is a man in Philadelphia to-day who once stood on the brink of business failure. He had come to the end of his resources. Those who were his known friends had done all they could do for him. No banker would assist him further.

Yet he, too, had a neighbor! He

had chatted with this man a few times. But there was no bond between them.

That evening, disconsolate, discouraged, broken in spirit, he went home, knowing that the morning would bring his ruin. Across the street sat his neighbor, who noticed his downcast look.

“Something is wrong over there,” he told his wife. “I wonder what it can be.”

The next morning he walked over to see the dejected man.

“I’ve been thinking about you,” he said. “Are you in trouble? Is there something I can do to help?”

The man told his story.

“I’ll advance the money you need,” said his neighbor quietly.

That man, who was on the brink

of failure, is to-day one of the successful business men of Philadelphia. What neither friends nor bankers could or would do for him a neighbor did. You may ask why he did it. I asked too, and I learned the explanation.

Said the neighbor: "I had seen that man day in and day out with his family. I knew his habits of life; and I knew him to be worth while. When I saw he was in trouble I wanted to help him if I could."

So I do care "what the neighbors will think," despite my protestations that I don't. When I put on old clothes and look like a ditch digger, when I sit in my shirt sleeves on my own front porch vainly blustering about my independence, it is all sham! Secretly, I am sure that none

of my neighbors will think the less of me for those petty violations of propriety. But if I thought they would, I should not commit them.

THERE is a gang playing marbles in our living-room to-night as I write this. We have been turned into a small room upstairs to make way for them. If we had a house far off on a high hill, there would be no such shouts of contest going on below. No muddy feet would be tramping down our rugs or leaving their telltale stamp upon the upholstery of our furniture. The house might be orderly and neat—but it would be a prison to our boy. His young life is filled with companionship and fun, because we have neighbors.

So, I do care what my neighbors think, and I do care what they say. And I'm glad that they are just as much interested in Mother and me as we are in them. Life would be pretty drab otherwise.









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